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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KPAL](#) [TU](#) [JO](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: TURKISH DELEGATION POSTPONES VISIT TO MUGHRABI
GATE EXCAVATIONS

REF: A. TEL AVIV 466

[1](#)B. TEL AVIV 455
[1](#)C. TEL AVIV 441

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR RICHARD H. JONES, REASON 1.4 (B) (D)

[1](#)1. (U) DURING PRIME MINISTER OLMERT'S FEBRUARY 14-15 VISIT TO ANKARA, ISRAELI MEDIA REPORTED THAT OLMERT RESPONDED TO CRITICISM BY TURKISH PRIME MINISTER ERDOGAN OF ISRAELI ARCHEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS NEXT TO THE MUGHRABI GATE TO THE TEMPLE MOUNT/HARAM AL SHARIF BY INVITING A TURKISH DELEGATION TO INSPECT THE SITE. SUBSEQUENT ISRAELI PRESS REPORTS INDICATED THAT THE TURKISH AMBASSADOR, ACCOMPANIED BY TURKISH ENGINEERS AND TECHNICAL EXPERTS, WOULD VISIT THE SITE THE WEEK OF FEBRUARY 19.

[1](#)2. (C) IN A CONVERSATION WITH POLCOUNS FEBRUARY 21, TURKISH DCM MEHMET BOZAY SAID THAT AFTER OLMERT'S VISIT, THE GOT BEGAN TO HAVE SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT PUTTING TURKEY AT THE CENTER OF THE LATEST CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING THE HOLY PLACES IN JERUSALEM. NOTING THAT SOME PALESTINIANS HAD CRITICIZED TURKEY FOR ALLEGEDLY FORGETTING THAT "TURKISH RULE IN JERUSALEM ENDED NINETY YEARS AGO," BOZAY SAID THE TURKS WORRIED THAT IF THE TURKISH DELEGATION DETERMINED THAT THE ISRAELI EXCAVATIONS POSED A DANGER TO THE AL AQSA AND DOME OF THE ROCK MOSQUES, TURKEY WOULD RISK A CRISIS IN ITS RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL, WHILE IF THEY CONCLUDED THAT THE EXCAVATIONS WERE HARMLESS, THEN TURKEY WOULD BE ATTACKED BY MUSLIMS. ERDOGAN AND FOREIGN MINISTER GUL HAD THEREFORE DECIDED NOT TO SEND A DELEGATION TO JERUSALEM.

[1](#)3. (C) BOZAY SAID THE GOT HAD INSTEAD DECIDED TO INVITE A JORDANIAN DELEGATION TO VISIT ANKARA TO CONFER ON A JOINT RESPONSE TO THE ISRAELI EXCAVATIONS. DEPENDING ON THE OUTCOME OF THEIR TALKS, THERE MIGHT BE A JOINT VISIT TO THE SITE, OR THE JORDANIANS MIGHT SEEK TURKISH SUPPORT FOR A REQUEST TO OLMERT TO APPROVE A JORDANIAN DELEGATION INSTEAD. BOZAY COMMENTED THAT HE THOUGHT A QUIET ISRAELI-JORDANIAN DIALOGUE HELD THE BEST PROSPECT FOR FINDING A SOLUTION.

[1](#)4. (C) COMMENT: DURING CODEL KYL'S FEBRUARY 19 VISIT TO THE WESTERN WALL, EMBOFFS OBSERVED SMALL NUMBERS OF WORKERS CARRYING OUT THE EXCAVATIONS WITH HAND TOOLS AND WITHOUT THE USE OF HEAVY EQUIPMENT. THE CODEL'S VISIT TOOK PLACE WITHOUT INCIDENT, ALTHOUGH A SUBSTANTIAL ISRAELI SECURITY PRESENCE WAS EVIDENT IN THE WESTERN WALL PLAZA. GIVEN CONTINUED SENSITIVITIES, HOWEVER, THE CURRENT CALM IS NO GUARANTEE THAT VIOLENCE CANNOT BREAK OUT AT ANY TIME.

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JONES